

## EXPLORING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF CHILD LABOR EXPLOITATION, GONDAR, NORTH WEST ETHIOPIA

KELEMU FENTA GEBEYEHU<sup>1\*</sup>, ALEMAYEHU MULAT<sup>2</sup>, BEWKETU DEREJE<sup>3</sup>, MASTEWAL ABAWA<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology, Gondar University, Gondar, Ethiopia. <sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology, Debremarkos University, Debre Marqos, Ethiopia. <sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology, Wolayita Sodo University, Wolayta Sodo, Ethiopia. <sup>4</sup>Department of Psychology, Gondar University, Gondar, Ethiopia. Email: kelemusosa@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The issue of child labor abuse and exploitation becomes a serious problem at local, national and international level, and in our context, children are engaged in laborious and seriously exploitative working condition due to various socio-economic challenges. Hence, the main objective of this study was conducted to explore the major socio-economic determinants of child labor exploitation in Gondar town in the case of Arada area.

**Methods:** In doing this, we have employed mixed research method of survey for quantitative and key informant interview for qualitative research methods. The data were collected from 25 respondents (20 children, 2 residents, and 3 non-governmental organizations) which were taken from purposively selected area.

**Results:** The data collected revealed that parental and communal positive attitude toward child labor, low educational status of their family, poverty, early marriage, divorce, lack of community awareness toward child rights, and illegitimacy of child labor, death of parents, migration and the presence of abusive working condition at home is the major socio-economic determinants of child labor exploitation in the study area.

**Conclusion:** Child labor exploitation is the result of various socio-economic situations of children themselves, their families and the surrounding community.

**Keywords:** Child labor Exploitation, Socio-economic determinants, Mixed Approach and Child.

### INTRODUCTION

Both in developed and developing nations, children face different menaces that potentially harm their social, physical, psychological, and behavioral developments [1]. In developing countries like Ethiopia problems of poverty, malnutrition, and social instability, or disorder create problems of far-reaching impacts for the proper utilization of children as a resource requires, at a minimum adequate provision of health, education and child and family welfare services. For those poor nations, these provisions are hardly existent and children at a high degree of risk with regard to their welfare and overall development [1].

More specifically, in the developing world where Ethiopia belongs to have the largest bulk of child laborers. Child labor refers to labor performed by a child who is under the minimum age of 18 years which specified in a national legislation for the kind of work and labor that jeopardizes the physical, mental or moral well-being of child [2]. Child labor was first conceptualized as a social problem during industrialization in Great Britain and the reason was related to the need of cheap unskilled labor factors and new moral concerns about child labor (ibid) [2].

It is usually assumed that child labor abuses and exploitation in contemporary industrialized or post-industrialized society do not work and that child labor abuse is a problem in developing world and majority of them are engaged in all forms of work, in shop, in agriculture, in factories, marketplace, street corner and household which are extremely dangerous situation exploitative and abusive condition [3].

The 1995 ILO estimate indicated that two-three hundred million children are in laborious employment around the world, a third of this was the share of Africa – the largest proportion in the developing world [4].

Employing children for their labor is commonly practicing in the capital and different provincial areas of Ethiopia. Among different regional places Gondar with its neighborhood rural areas, is the one in which the practice of child labor is prevailing in the form of written agreement between child's parents and the employer [5]. This is because the social value attached to children is considered as an instrument to meet the economic needs of households, and poverty leads children to engage in work above their capacity and for longer hours, and in an environment which brings danger to their physical, social, and psychological health.

According to Addisu [1], in Gulele subcity of Addis Ababa, child labor abuse is caused by poverty, unemployment of parents, migration, the education system, HIV/AIDS and family disintegration, and affect children's health, physical, psychological and intellectual developments. In North Gondar in general and in Gondar town in particular, there are reports of exploitation and abusive activities on children in various ways like labor, sexual, and mental.

To protect children from hazardous work and working conditions governments and international organizations like UN and ILO provide law of activities and in what type of activities they have to participate child, irresponsible parent and marriage breakdown. However, the problem usually is that governments of countries who have the problem of child labor are not able to give adequate funding for watching over places where children work [6].

Although the above studies and efforts explain child labor exploitation, they did not show the specific determinant factors of child labor exploitation comprehensively at the local context. Therefore, this research claims its own uniqueness due to the reason that it is an initial scientific attempt that assesses the determinants of child labor exploitation in Gondar town. Thus, this research was done to fill those gaps through exploring the major determinants of child labor exploitation in Gondar town in the case of Arada area via addressing

the following research question; what are, family and community-related factors that cause children to engage in laborious work? What are the potential socio-economic factors that force children to engage in laborious work?

**METHODS**

**Study design**

The study was cross-sectional mixed (quantitative and qualitative) research which was completed in 4 consecutive months from February up to May. From quantitative census survey method was used to get data, with little cost and short period of time, from children who are working in laborious working conditions. From qualitative key informant, interview methods were employed to get rich, detail, and qualitative information on the issue-child labor exploitation from local residents and concerned non-governmental organizations. In terms of its purpose, the study was descriptive to understand the existing problem in detail.

**Study area**

The research was conducted in Gondar town around Arada area, where the bus station and marketplaces are actual places where contact with informant children was made. Here, the respondents of the study were children who are working as a shoeshine, children who sell gum, bread, kolo, soft, newspaper (venders) or petty traders, and children who carry baggage and different commodities in the bus station and marketplaces (porters).

**Sampling techniques**

The study used both non-probability and probability sampling techniques specifically purposive and simple random sampling techniques, respectively, were used to select appropriate informants from the study areas (child laborers) and key informants from local residents and non-governmental institutions.

**Sample size**

The study was conducted based on 20 children who were selected with census survey method and the remaining 5 are key informants taken from the community members (two Kebele 9 and 10 residents) and from organizations (Anppan Ethiopia, Save the Children Norway and Children Right, Security and Welfare Core Process Office) which working on the issue of children.

Table 1 indicates the age disparities among exploited children and is between the age of 9 and 15 and in terms of sex majority of them were males. In addition, the Table 1 also shows that 6 children are shoe shiners, 7 children are porters, and 7 of them are also street vendors.

**Source of data and method of data collection**

There are two sources of data, primary, and secondary sources. Primary sources are sample respondents that are used as a source of data through questionnaire and interview. Secondary sources such as books, senior essays, newspapers, and other relevant materials also were used to get more information and for better understanding of the problem in question.

**Method of data analysis**

The data gathered using quantitative method was analyzed or summarized in descriptive way using tables and graphs. The qualitative data, i.e., data collected from key informants was analyzed thematically by summarizing the information gathered from concerned bodies.

**Ethical consideration**

In doing research considering ethical issues is important. Especially, researches done on human beings highly require ethical approval from the concerned body. In general to get ethical acceptance, all concerned bodies at all levels were informed of the aims and objectives as well as expected advantages of the study. Written consent and assent were requested from the respondents before the instruments are administered. The researcher tried to keep confidentiality of the information and the privilege of privacy to them.

**RESULTS**

**Parental conditions and community attitude on child labor exploitation**

Table 2 indicates respondents' parental employment condition. Accordingly, self-employed fathers accounted 35%; informally employed constitute 10%; formal employed in governmental sectors accounted only 5%, and 2 respondent children's fathers are unemployed.

Table 2 also shows employment condition of mother of respondent child laborers. As the Table 2 shows, 7 (35%) of children's mothers are self-employed; whereas, 1 (5%) of children's mother are informally employed, besides unemployed and other cases like death and working in marginal works such as baking Enjera, spinning cotton and daily work together accounted about 60%.

From this Table 2, it can be deduced that majority of parents of working children are either self-employed in their own farms since most of laboring children are from surrounding rural areas, or engaging in marginal and low-income generating jobs. Moreover, there are also unemployed parents specially mothers of child laborers which accounted 30% of cases.

Table 3 indicates the education level of respondents' father in which illiteracy accounted 45%; 6 (30%) of respondents fathers are in elementary level; and junior secondary and higher secondary school, respectively, accounted 5% and 10%.

Table 3 also shows the education level of respondents' mother and illiteracy accounted about 50%, whereas, 35% of them are within the elementary level and 15% are in other cases.

Table 3 indicates those respondents' parents are mainly illiterate in which their fathers and mothers, respectively, accounted 45% and mothers' 50%. In addition, the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest proportion is an elementary level which accounted 30% of fathers and 35% mothers. Therefore, it can be implied educational status of parents is lower.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic background of respondents**

Variables	Work type			Frequency (%)
	Shoe shiner	Porter	Street vender	
Age (in years)				
9	1	-	1	2 (10)
10	1	-	2	3 (15)
11	2	-	1	3 (15)
12	-	1	1	2 (10)
13	1	2	1	4 (20)
14	1	2	-	3 (15)
15	-	2	1	3 (15)
Total	6	7	7	20 (100)
Sex				
Male	6	7	2	15 (75)
Female	-	-	5	5 (25)
Total	6	7	7	20 (100)

**Table 2: Respondents' parental employment condition**

Item	Frequency (%)			
	Father		Mother	
Employment condition of parents				
Self employed	7	35	7	35
Informally employed	2	10	1	5
Formally employed	1	5	-	-
Unemployed	2	10	6	30
Others	8	40	6	30
Total	20	100	20	100

Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents based on their answer on the local community attitude toward their laborious work. Accordingly, the community which accepts child labor as normal activity accounted about 60%. However, only 10% of respondents reported as their community do not accept child work. Besides, 30% of the respondents indicate the community remains neutral toward children's engagement in laborious work. Hence, from this Table 4, it can be deduced that the local community is positive toward child labor or have a neutral attitude. In other words, the acceptance of community toward child labor may affect child labor exploitation either through employing them in laborious work or through not intervening on the problem of child workers along the street side in the town.

#### Socio-economic determinants of child labor exploitation

Table 5 shows that 46.67% of children are migrated due to poverty. Besides, marital instability and death of parents accounted 20% each and 13.33% of children migrated because they faced corporal punishment from their families. From this Table 5, it can be inferred that poverty is the leading cause for migration and in turn contribute for child labor exploitation.

Table 6 shows factors which contribute for initial recruitment of children for work. Accordingly, the children who are initially recruited to work voluntarily to meet economic needs accounted 50%, whereas 40% of them begin work since they are socialized by their parents and friends and 2 children (10%) enter their work because compelled by others.

As this data indicates, the majority of child laborers engaged in work voluntarily. However, it does not come from altruism to work rather their situation compelled them to have only one choice, engaging in laborious work and lead their life. The 2<sup>nd</sup> largest proportion is children begging laborers' work by socialization of their parents and friends to support family income and to meet their needs.

Table 6 also indicates why children basically engaged in laborious work. Accordingly, 15% children said that they are in laborious work because of death of parents and poorness of their families accounted 40% for child labor and 20% of children do such based on their preference to work. Other children which cover about 5% reported different cases like large family size and loss of hope for the future because of a shortage of land for working at home in agricultural activities.

Similarly, the response from qualitative interviewees of the local residents explained that the major socio-economic determinants of child labor exploitation includes death of parents, separation from parents, poverty, migration, corporal punishment of children at home, early marriage, and community's positive attitude to child labor.

**Table 3: Parental level of education**

Item	Frequency (%)	
	Father	Mother
Parents' level of education		
Illiterate	9 (45)	10 (50)
Elementary	6 (30)	7 (35)
Junior secondary	2 (10)	-
Higher secondary	1 (5)	-
Above these and other cases (specified)	2 (10)	3 (15)
Total	20 (100)	20 (100)

**Table 4: Attitude of the local community toward child labor**

Item	Response	Frequency (%)
What is the attitude of the local community towards your laborious work?	Accept it as normal	12 (60)
	Do not accept	2 (10)
	Neutral	6 (30)
	Total	20 (100)

Institutional responses from ANNPCAN – Ethiopia, Save the Children and Children Right, Security and Welfare Core Process Office also revealed that poverty, lack of community awareness to child rights and illegitimacy of exploiting their labor, the culture of normalizing child work, land scarcity, famine divorce, and the early marriage are the major determinants which force children to engage in laborious and hazardous works.

#### DISCUSSION

Children are engaged in all forms of paid work in factories services industries, shops and marketplaces and in houses hold chores. UNICEF has classified child work into three categories. These are (1) within the family (domestic work and non-domestic and non-paid work), (2) within the family but outside the home (wage laborers), and (3) outside the family (Bonded labor, marginal activities and child prostitution) [7].

According to Assefa and Boyden [8], marginal activities are forms of child labor which includes the involvement of children in various informal sectors such as petty, trade, newspaper selling, and other similar activities. In such activities, the children are not supervised by the existing law, and as a result of these, they are subjective to hazardous working condition. Children under these forms of child labor are more or less self-employed due to various reasons.

As has been observed in this study child laborers along the street side are engaged mainly in three marginal works such as shoe shiner, porter age, and street vending. However, there are other works in which street children perform less frequently compared to the above jobs. These are washing cars, cleaning shop floors, and avoiding garbages.

Several studies reveal that children are engaged in paid works due to social, economic, political, and attitudinal factors. Among these factors poverty, being an orphan child, irresponsible parenthood and marriage breakdown are mentioned. Government policies, unemployment and underemployment, non-conducive school environment and large family size also force children to engage in laborious work [4]. Children are easier to manage less aware of their rights, less troublesome, less complaining, more trustworthy, less paid and more flexible. Because of these characteristics, employers demand them to hire in different

**Table 5: Respondents' pulling and pushing factors for their migration and work**

Item	Response	Frequency (%)
What factors push you to come to this town and engaged in work?	Poverty	7 (46.67)
	Marital instability of parents	3 (20)
	Death of parents	3 (20)
	Corporal punishment	2 (13.33)
	Others	-
	Total	15 (100)

**Table 6: Source of initial requirement of work and root determinants of child labor**

Item	Response	Frequency (%)
Factor for initial recruitment for work	Voluntarily to meet economic needs	10 (50)
	Socialized by parents or friends	8 (40)
	Compelled	1 (5)
	Others (specified)	1 (5)
	Total	20 (100)
Main factors for engaging in work	Being an orphan child	3 (15)
	Poor family background	8 (40)
	Preference to work	4 (20)
	Other (specified)	5 (25)
	Total	20 (100)

informal sectors. This is the demand factor for child labor [4,9]. Lack of educational opportunities due to no access to school, low-quality education or parents' value of school also forced children to engage in laborers' work [10]. Traditional factors, illiteracy of parents and conflict with parents affect child labor exploitation specially, in rural areas [11]. Moreover, migration in relation with above factors is also the major reason for child labor exploitation [12].

According to this study, the major socio-economic determinants of child labor exploitation are poverty, death of parents, migration, instability of parents living condition, low level educational attainment or illiteracy of parents and marginal occupation of parents, scarcity of arable land, drought famine and unfavorable living condition in rural areas, abusive work at home and corporal punishment by parents and the practice of early marriage that leads girls to escape out of family and migrate to towns.

The study also shows the positive attitude of families and community that accept child labor as a normal economic activity to meet their own needs and to support their family. The community as well as the family lack awareness regarding the rights children, the illegality of sending or employing children abusive work. Moreover, the community has a culture of considering work as part of socialization and upbringing without taking into account which types of work are appropriate or not.

According to ILO [9], children's work in the global south is viewed as learning attitudes, knowledge, skill and behaviors, and an integral part of the educational and developmental process of the child and of the family's obligation toward child rearing and upbringing. Hence, our study community reflects this notion in addition to children's economic value.

Moreover, the family background of our study targets, being mostly from rural area exacerbated the above conditions with the existing poor economic situation which in turn leads rural children migrate to towns and engage in laborious work.

Experiencing the above problems children in our study area engaged in laborious work or exploitation work as it is determined by UNICEF [7]. They work for longer hours at their early age with minimum payment or income. Besides they work in an environment which is deteriorated with garbage, unpleasant smell and sunburn. Moreover, they work repetitive baring work in a crowded place which hazards their psychology.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this study was to explore the socio-economic determinants of child labor exploitation and in relation to this the finding revealed that children at their early age are working in a situation which threatens their personality, healthy, education, social

and economic aspiration of their life. The major determinants of child labor exploitation are rooted in the family, community and the society at large and poverty and migration accounted mostly to put pressure on children to engage in laborious works. More specifically, there are other determinants which are death and instability of one's parent and family, low level of education, lack of awareness on the rights of children, divorce, land scarcity and others.

## RECOMENDATIONS

Based on the finding we have recommended the following points;

- The government in collaboration with the concerned organizations and individuals is expected to intervene in the general community, particularly poor families both in rural and urban areas in the form of family welfare provision and credit for better income generating activities.
- Local government and non-government organizations should give awareness toward children's right and the consequence of child labor exploitation to the family, parents, community, and society at large.
- Community-based organization in collaboration with government and non-government organizations should try to turn migrant children to their families by providing counseling service and transportation costs.
- The local organizations, family, resident, and others have to organize street child laborers and advocate for the legal protection and betterment of those children who are vulnerable to hazardous working conditions.

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